DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 214 CE 080 671

| | |
|---|---|
| TITLE | Perspectives on Progress: The School-to-Work National Customer Dialogues. Final Report. |
| INSTITUTION | Public Forum Inst., Washington, DC. |
| SPONS AGENCY | National School-to-Work Opportunities Office, Washington, DC. |
| PUB DATE | 2000-09-18 |
| NOTE | 28p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | For full text: http://www.publicforuminstitute.com/stw/pfi_report918.htm. |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Evaluative (142) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC02 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Academic Achievement; Articulation (Education); Change Strategies; College Programs; *Education Work Relationship; Educational Attainment; *Educational Attitudes; *Educational Benefits; Educational Change; Educational Improvement; Educational Legislation; Educational Policy; Employment Opportunities; Employment Patterns; Federal Legislation; Government School Relationship; Innovation; National Programs; *Partnerships in Education; Policy Formation; Postsecondary Education; *Public Policy; Regional Planning; *School Business Relationship; School Community Relationship; Secondary Education; Two Year Colleges |
| IDENTIFIERS | Impact Studies; *School to Work Opportunities Act 1994 |

ABSTRACT

"Perspectives on Progress: The School-to-Work (STW) National Customer Dialogues" was a series of six regional and two national discussions that were held between December 1999 and July 2000 to gather the views of more than 700 employers, educators, labor union representatives, students, parents, community-based organizations, and state and local policymakers on STW and its impacts. The following were among the key findings of the polling sessions, listening sessions, and a customer feedback Web site used to solicit stakeholder views: (1) STW works for students (the overwhelming majority of participants stated that STW's benefits to students met or exceeded their expectations); (2) STW works for businesses and communities (nearly three-fourths of participants reported that STW's benefits to their organizations met or exceeded their expectations); (3) STW initiatives have been widely embraced (a significant majority of participants planned to remain involved in STW initiatives over the next 5 years); and (4) STW is a valuable initiative worthy of expanded commitment and continued investment (a majority or participants in the regional and national sessions believed that STW initiatives have not had enough time to fulfill their potential and that communities need more time and resources to develop and sustain their STW partnerships and system infrastructure). (MN)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

# Perspectives on Progress:

ED 445 214

## The School-To-Work National Customer Dialogues

**FINAL REPORT**

**Report Prepared for**
**The National School-to-Work Office by:**
The Public Forum Institute
September 18, 2000
www.PublicForumInstitute.com

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.



THE PUBLIC FORUM INSTITUTE
2300 M STREET, NW. • SUITE 900 • WASHINGTON, DC 20037 • (PH) 202.467.2774 • FAX) 202-293-5712

# The School-to-Work Opportunities Act

## Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings from ***Perspectives on Progress: The School-to-Work (STW) National Customer Dialogues***, a series of discussions held to gather customer feedback on initiatives that began and/or gained momentum under the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. Six regional and two national discussions were held between December 1999 and July 2000. During this time, over 700 individuals from across the nation shared their views and opinions on STW.

At each regional Dialogue, a morning session hosted employers and labor representatives; an afternoon session involved a "cross-cutting" group of STW stakeholders, including educators, parents, students, employers, labor, and other community partners. In three regions, a "listening" session was held in the early evening. Two separate national Dialogues were held, one for state STW directors and another for national employer and labor representatives. Finally, a customer feedback web site was open for public comment on STW while regional and national discussions were being held.

Based on firsthand experiences in implementing STW, participants were asked their views on the impacts of STW, initiatives worthy of future investment, and next steps needed to sustain STW opportunities for all students when the federal STW legislation sunsets on October 1, 2001.

# Overview

## Purpose

***Perspectives on Progress: The School-to-Work National Customer Dialogues*** were conducted by The Public Forum Institute and hosted by the National School-to-Work Office, which is jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor. The sessions gathered customer feedback — both quantitative and anecdotal — on the accomplishments, impacts, and future of initiatives that began and/or gained momentum with the passage of the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994.

This report is designed to provide information for national, state, and local policy-makers as they decide on future initiatives and new investments in education and workforce development for America's youth when the federal STW legislation sunsets on October 1, 2001.

1. **STW works for students.**

- The overwhelming majority of participants (84% cross-cutting; 81% employer /labor) said that benefits to students involved in STW met or exceeded their expectations.
- Eighty-one percent (81%) of cross-cutting participants agreed that STW experiences help students to meet challenging state academic standards.
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of employer/labor representatives agreed that STW broadens students' career options.
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of employer/labor representatives agreed that STW experiences are beneficial for students who plan to attend college, and 96% of cross-cutting participants agreed that STW helps students to be better prepared for college.

2. **STW works for business and communities.**

- Nearly three-quarters of participants (74% employer/labor; 73% cross-cutting) reported that benefits to their organizations as a result of STW involvement met or exceeded their expectations.
- The majority of participants (66% cross-cutting; 60% employer/labor) said that benefits to their communities as a result of STW involvement met or exceeded their expectations.
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of employer/labor representatives agreed that STW is a good strategy for building a competitive workforce for the future.
- Employer/labor representatives reported that STW has opened an unprecedented dialogue among business, education, and other community partners.

## Participants

Participants in the Dialogues were STW customers and stakeholders — individuals who have developed, implemented, or participated in STW initiatives and programs. Groups represented were:

- Employers
- Postsecondary institutions
- Labor union representatives
- Intermediary organizations
- Educators
- Community-based organizations
- Students
- State and local policymakers
- Parents

Regional dialogue sessions were held in six cities across the country:

- Dallas, Texas
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- San Francisco, California
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Miami, Florida
- Boston, Massachusetts

In addition, two Dialogue sessions were held in Washington, D.C., one for state STW directors and the other for national employer and labor organization representatives.

**3. STW initiatives have been widely embraced.**

- A significant majority of participants (90% employer/labor; 80% cross-cutting) said they will remain involved in STW initiatives over the next five years.
- The overwhelming majority of participants (98% cross-cutting; 95% employer /labor) believe it is important for schools to provide opportunities for students to learn in workplaces or other community settings.
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of both employer/labor and cross-cutting participants believe it is a good idea for high school students to participate in internships.
- Most participants (89% cross-cutting; 83% employer/labor) support the development of career majors* for high school students.

**4. STW is a valuable initiative, worthy of continued commitment and investment.**

- A majority of participants in both regional and national sessions believe that STW initiatives have not had enough time to fulfill their potential and that communities need more time and resources to fully develop and sustain their STW partnerships and system infrastructure.
- Most employer/labor and cross-cutting participants ranked continued funding, especially for intermediary** activities, as a top priority to expand and strengthen STW initiatives.
- The majority of participants in both regional and national sessions deemed work-based learning, professional development (especially teacher externships in the workplace), and partnerships† as the STW initiatives most worthy of future investment.
- Participants in both regional and national sessions concluded that if information on STW and its benefits were more widely known, many more students, parents, employers, and other individuals in the community would want to get involved.

* Career majors are programs of study that link academic and occupational instruction with a related workplace learning experience in a broad career area.

** An intermediary is an organization that acts as a liaison between schools and workplaces and/or other community resources to improve young people's academic and career-related learning experiences.

† Partnerships are collaborative relationships among parents, students, educators, business, labor, and other community stakeholders.

## Methodology

To obtain a balance of quantitative and anecdotal information, the Dialogues employed a variety of formats:

- *Interactive polling sessions,* using anonymous voting devices, invited participants to express their candid views on a wide range of STW issues and topics. Employers and labor representatives participated in the morning, and a "cross-cutting" group of STW stakeholders participated in the afternoon.
- *Listening sessions* invited students, parents, teachers, and employers to provide feedback on how STW involvement has made a difference in their lives.
- *A customer feedback web site* was open for public comment on STW while the series of regional and national discussions were being held.

# Composition of Dialogue Participants

The regional interactive polling sessions drew a total of 479 participants, representing local communities in 33 states:

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- California
- Delaware
- Florida
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Mexico
- New Jersey
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- Texas
- Vermont
- Washington
- Wisconsin

Of these, 199 individuals participated in the morning employer/labor sessions. They reported their primary STW affiliation as:

- Employers (66%)
- Organized labor (11%)
- Other (e.g., educators, college or university staff, community-based organizations, parents, and national, state, or local policymakers) (24%)

The other 280 individuals attended the afternoon cross-cutting sessions. Representing a broad range of perspectives on education, workforce development, and economic development, they reported their primary STW affiliation as:

- Educators (34%)
- Employers or employer intermediaries (21%)
- National, state, or local policymakers (11%)
- College or university staff (9%)
- Community-based organizations (8%)
- Students (5%)
- Organized labor (3%)
- Parents (3%)
- Other (6%)

Participants in both sessions reported considerable prior involvement in STW. Over one-third of all participants (37%) represented organizations that had been involved in STW partnerships for two to four years. The next largest percentage of attendees (28% cross-cutting; 27% employer/labor) had been involved five to seven years.

The listening sessions drew over 250 individuals* from communities in and around Miami, Philadelphia, and Indianapolis. During these sessions, 51 parents, students, educators, and employers described how STW made a difference in their lives.

The customer feedback web site received input from more than 100 individuals across the nation.

At the State STW Directors Dialogue, perspectives were gathered from 40 STW Directors or their designees in 37 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands:

- Alabama
- Arizona
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Georgia
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Mississippi
- Montana
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- Puerto Rico
- Rhode Island
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virgin Islands
- Virginia
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

Finally, the National Employer and Organized Labor Dialogue drew 38 individuals from across the country.

*Unless otherwise noted, this report presents data and anecdotal comments from participants at the regional polling sessions. Due to time constraints, some questions were not asked of all participants at all sessions. The information is supplemented by feedback offered during the listening sessions and national Dialogue sessions, as well as through the customer feedback web site.*

* These individuals were not calculated into the total number of Dialogue participants reported in the Executive Summary because they did not provide oral or written feedback as part of the formal record of Dialogue proceedings.

## Finding #1: STW Works for Students

The federal STW legislation envisioned many results for students, such as exposing them to a number of broad career areas and helping them to gain the academic and technical skills required for success in both college and careers. Based on firsthand experience in implementing STW initiatives, participants were asked for feedback on results they have observed for students involved in STW. Participants also were asked for their perspectives on the extent to which STW involvement benefited their organizations and communities.

### Exceeding Expectations

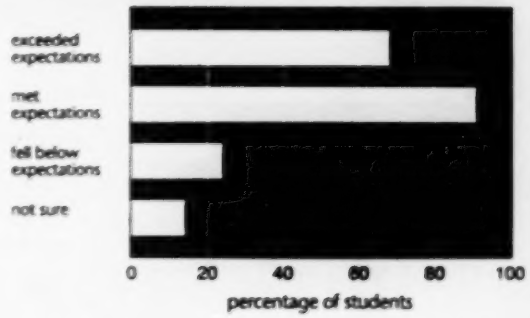
From Dialogue to Dialogue, from region to region, participants consistently stated that benefits to students involved in STW achieved their expectations. As indicated in ***Figure 1***, 84% of cross-cutting participants and 81% of employer /labor representatives said that benefits to students had either met or exceeded their expectations.

Where benefits to students fell below expectations, participants frequently indicated that intensive STW experiences, such as internships and mentoring, had not been available in sufficient quantity for all the students who sought them. These experiences, which are of longer duration and connected to students' academic coursework in school, are typically necessary to produce measurable results for students.

A Dallas Dialogue participant suggested that intensive STW experiences "tend to grow more slowly because they take significantly more time and resources to establish and maintain."

Moreover, participants commented that, while some student benefits — such as more scholarships and higher college acceptance rates — are easy to quantify, many outcomes from STW may not be so easily measured or even defined.

***Figure 1*** Benefits to Students — Employer/Labor Session




*Percentages of participants who said benefits to students involved in STW had exceeded, met, or fallen below their expectations.*

Nonetheless, participants in both sessions observed many clear and diverse benefits for students who take part in STW. Among the most commonly noted were (in order):

- More awareness about career options and better decision-making about these options
- Improved attitude, motivation, and self-confidence
- Better life and work skills (taking responsibility, decision-making, and time management)
- Better understanding of the relationship between academics and careers
- Better understanding of employability skills
- Increased high school completion, and increased participation/success in post-secondary education and training

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## Proof Positive

**In her keynote address at the Boston Dialogue, Cathy E. Minehan, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, described how Massachusetts has been preparing for the withdrawal of federal School-to-Career (STC)* funds. To garner support for local and state funding, she said, "Massachusetts had to prove that STC is effective; that students in [comprehensive] STC programs do better than would be expected otherwise and better than their peers in programs without STC."**

**And prove it Massachusetts did — using an intensive effort to gather data from schools and employers. Their conclusion, according to Ms. Minehan: "STC in its full implementation does produce better students who stay in school, get better grades, and go on to two- and four-year postsecondary programs at much better rates than their peers."**

* Term used in Massachusetts for their STW initiatives.

## A Life-Changing Experience

According to many stakeholders, STW involvement not only has a formative effect on young people, but often a transforming one as well. An educator at the Miami Dialogue captured this view: "I have seen students with little direction discover their niche in as little as one trimester. They learn to believe in themselves, love what they are learning, and excel."

Many stakeholders said that the boost in self-confidence so often observed in participating students leads to a subsequent increase in their academic engagement and success. The mother of a high school senior shared her daughter's success story: "Her grades have jumped tremendously. She's built a lot of self-confidence and she's seen that this is something she can do. She's also learned skills that have helped in her academics."

Students likewise have recognized the positive influence of STW involvement on their studies. "STW made me achieve higher and work harder," remarked a recent graduate from Philadelphia who has participated in STW initiatives since ninth grade and is starting college this year.

An Indianapolis-area student who participated in summer career camps and six-week internships had a similar experience: "Through this program, I excelled in vital classes that I otherwise probably would have struggled with."

## It's Academic

In case after case, educators and parents said students who participated in STW initiatives displayed new enthusiasm for their academic studies. "Time after time," one educator summarized, "with every student, their academics improve, their grades improve, and they become a much better student."

At the Indianapolis listening session, an educator described how, since taking on STW coordinator responsibilities, she has come to hear a new, now familiar, refrain from parents: "I have seen such a change in my children. They're really excited about their education."

Asked about the relationship between STW involvement and academic achievement, cross-cutting participants agreed, to some or a great extent, that STW experiences have led students to:

- Feel more motivated to learn (99%)
- Have a clearer focus for their education (99%)
- Stay in school when they otherwise might have dropped out (91%)
- Earn better grades in their academic courses (88%)

In addition, 81% of cross-cutting participants agreed that STW experiences help students to meet challenging state academic standards, and 89% disagreed that STW interferes with students' taking more rigorous academic courses required for graduation. A significant majority (73%) also said that STW is not synonymous with traditional vocational education.

In fact, participants often attested that more students embrace challenging courses as a result of their STW experiences. One teacher shared how his students took more advanced math courses, like geometry, as a direct result of their STW engineering internships. "Before their internships," he said, "they never had a clue they would ever take these courses."

"Through this program, I excelled in vital classes that I otherwise probably would have struggled with."

**Student**

According to participants at the STW State Directors Dialogue, STW has also had an impact on the higher standards movement currently driving education in America. They ranked STW's greatest contributions to education as (in order):

- Promoting business/education partnerships
- Providing relevance for rigorous academic standards for all students
- Improving classroom instruction
- Providing resources to implement comprehensive Kindergarten through adult education reform
- Supporting the integration of academic and occupational standards

## Bound for College

Based on participant's observations, the influence of STW extends beyond high school. Participants reported that students who take part in STW have greater enthusiasm for pursuing postsecondary education — and a greater chance at succeeding.

"I have seen such a change in my children. They're really excited about their education."

**Parent**

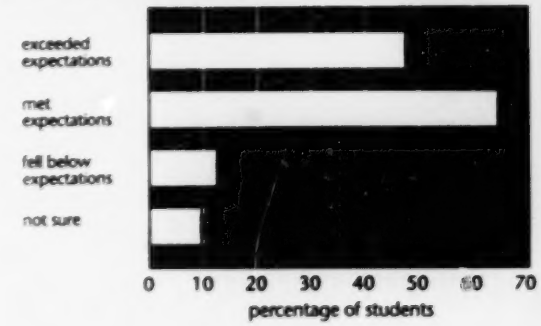
As illustrated in ***Figure 2***, the overwhelming majority (96%) of cross-cutting participants agreed that STW experiences help students to be better prepared for college. A similarly high majority (97%) of employer/labor participants agreed that STW experiences are beneficial for students who plan to attend college.

"There were students who didn't even think about going on to college before they took part in STW, and now they're in college," one educator observed. "Once they get out there, they realize there are so many things they can grab on to and experience. It gives them motivation to go on to college."

An employer described feedback she had received from other employers at a school advisory council meeting. After following up on student interns, employers reported, "Their increased degree of responsibility and 'real world' perspectives made them better college students."

Finally, one employer pointed out a practical advantage to students' career exposure through STW: "It saves the students time and the parents money. There are so many students in college who don't have a clue why they're studying what they are. There is a tremendous need for career education."

***Figure 2*** Benefits to Students — Cross-Cutting Session




*Percentages of participants who agreed that STW experiences have a positive impact on college attendance.*

## Making "the Lights Come On"

Dialogue participants indicated that STW is an ideal vehicle to make learning relevant for students. One educator at the San Francisco Dialogue summarized, "Many students are, for the first time, able to see the connection between classroom studies and future employment."

An educator at the Indianapolis Dialogue elicited nods of agreement from many participants when he said, "The challenge we face in high schools is to make learning relevant. Until we make that connection, the lights don't really come on. Focusing on a career really makes the lights come on for students."

Further emphasizing this point, cross-cutting participants agreed unanimously that STW has led students to see the relevance of their academic studies for their future careers.* A majority (96%) of employer/labor representatives agreed that STW experiences help students in this area.

Understanding the relevancy of education was thought to have a beneficial impact on students, regardless of whether they planned to pursue postsecondary education or training. "Kids who aren't high academic achievers but who get internships... return to school with a gleam in their eye for academic subjects," an educator at the Boston Dialogue explained. "They've seen that math and English skills are required in the workplace to do what they want to do."

An employer at the Dallas Dialogue summarized, "One of the primary benefits of STW is that it helps kids see the relevance of what they are learning. If they see the importance of communicating well in the workplace, it gives their English class more relevance."

## Focused on Careers

Of all student benefits discussed in the Dialogue sessions, participants most frequently cited those related to students' understanding of careers. Participants noted that, through STW, students become more aware of their career options, are better prepared for the career market, and are more realistic about career prospects.

"STW experiences provide a roadmap to success and satisfaction," an educator remarked, reflecting the experiences of many participants. "Career opportunities are so vast that students need tools to explore their options and make informed decisions. STW provides the framework that students require to navigate successfully."

Reinforcing this notion, cross-cutting participants unanimously agreed that STW experiences:

- Broaden students' career options (100%)
- Help students better prepare for careers (100%)

Attendees of employer/labor sessions voiced 97% agreement that STW experiences broaden students' career options.

Participants also saw the development of career awareness as an important influence on students' academic success. A parent described how her son took more science classes after deciding to pursue his interest in chemical engineering. She said he immediately understood what it would require to meet his career goals: "It's not important enough that I just take the classes. I've also got to do well in them."

* Due to time constraints, participants in fewer than half of the Dialogue sessions responded to this question.

Students were especially enthusiastic about the career guidance they gained from their STW experiences. "It helps you get insight into what you think you might want to do. If you still love it, that equals success! If you don't, that too equals success," said a Champaign, Illinois, student.

A Dallas student summed up the benefits of STW involvement, stating, "STW is all about finding something in life you love so much you'd do it for free, but you learn to do it so well you get paid for it."

## Reaching All Students

Reflecting the views of many participants, one STW coordinator noted, "STW has had the most impact of any educational program on addressing the career development needs of all students." A representative of a community-based organization added, "We have all kinds of programs for young people with special needs, gifted students, disadvantaged students. STW has truly been a ray of hope for all students."

One employer noted that among the many students who benefited from their STW involvement in his organization were economically disadvantaged students. "These programs give these students a vision of the future," he said. "Students gain a new sense of the value of learning."

Parents of special education students also affirmed STW's positive impact on their childrens' career outlook. In Philadelphia, the father of a young woman receiving special education services shared his family's experience: "Before this [STW] program, my wife and I didn't know which way to turn. Since our daughter has joined STW, she has become responsible. She's very positive about where she wants to go in life." His wife added, "My daughter has come a long way. As a result of her STW program, she has goals. She wants to do something [for] society."

## Increasing Involvement

In Dialogues across the country, participants noted that, despite the overwhelming benefits to STW participation, there remains a tension between STW and the push for higher academic standards and standardized testing for students. "Currently, in my state, the only things people talk about are the state academic standards test and the ACT 48," stated one STW coordinator. "We are doing what we can locally to sustain the [STW] initiative, but with no money and no state focus, our work from here on out will be minimally recognized," she said.

Another STW coordinator made a similar observation: "Right now, in a large high school, there is a great divide. Students do not have time or places in their schedules to do work-based learning. It is perceived that academics must come first because that is what colleges want. We need to overcome this barrier," he continued, "we need to understand that STW is for all students." Participants roundly agreed that the role of work-based learning in increasing academic achievement needed to be better communicated.

Participants concluded that, with increased recognition that STW leads students to be more motivated, more interested in their studies, and, ultimately, to become higher academic achievers, many more students would become involved.

> "There were students who didn't even think about going on to college before they took part in STW, and now they're in college. Once they get out there, they realize there are so many things they can grab on to and experience. It gives them motivation to go on to college."
>
> **Educator**

> "STW is all about finding something in life you love so much you'd do it for free, but you learn to do it so well you get paid for it."
>
> **Student**

## A Story of Success

One Midwestern teacher described the experience of a high school junior who had been struggling to succeed in school.

"His capabilities were never a problem, but his attitude was really bad. He didn't come to school, because he didn't see the relevance of what he was doing. His grades were horrible."

Remarkably, after just a couple of visits to an "Academy of Finance" class and interaction with employers who came into the classroom, "something struck him," the teacher said. "He finished that year with perfect attendance and straight A's. 'Now I see why I'm here,' he told me. And that is exactly the kind of thing we hear from all our students."

# Finding #2: STW Works for Business and Communities

The federal STW legislation intended to build upon and strengthen partnerships among business, education, and communities, in order to make STW opportunities available to all students who want them. Participants were asked their views on the benefits to their organizations for involvement in STW, as well as barriers — if any — that need to be addressed.

## Benefiting Business

Students clearly are not the only beneficiaries of STW involvement. For the vast majority of Dialogue participants, STW yielded positive outcomes for their organizations and communities. Three-quarters of all participants (74% employer/labor; 73% cross-cutting) reported that the benefits to their organization for involvement in STW met or exceeded their expectations.

STW also exceeded the majority of participants' expectations for benefits to their communities. Sixty-six percent (66%) of cross-cutting participants and 60% of employer/labor representatives said that benefits to their community for involvement in STW met or exceeded their expectations. Where benefits fell below expectations, participants frequently cited the relatively short duration of community-wide involvement. One employer concluded, "What we're [trying to implement] is a very long-term vision and I don't think we can expect communities to see results that quickly. It's just something that takes time."

## Returns on Investment

Participants of both sessions were asked to consider the most commonly observed benefits to their organizations for STW involvement. They most often cited the following (in order):

- Increased involvement in education, resulting in employers having the opportunity to communicate skills required in the workplace
- Workforce development — better-skilled employees coming into the workplace
- Future employee recruitment
- Enhanced community relations

For many employers, the most significant benefit of STW participation was the door it opened to partnerships with educators. "STW has enabled a dialogue between business, education, parents, government, and students that is unprecedented," said a Sacramento employer and training director. A school board member who is a local employer agreed: "This program has opened dialogue between educators and businesses that did not exist." Another employer added that these new relationships went beyond the immediate impact of enhanced communications. "As an employer," she said, "we're building trust in the community with STW."

Another employer observed that STW "gives employers a chance to communicate what competencies and skills are needed for people coming through our gate." Moreover, employers repeatedly stated that through STW they were giving back to their communities.

Educators said that they find their partnerships with employers equally beneficial. "There used to be a lot of finger-pointing about the cause of poorly trained workers," one STW coordinator said. "Now we work together between businesses and schools to solve problems."

Post-secondary educators noted that these new relationships went beyond the immediate impact of enhanced communication. In her keynote address at the San Francisco Dialogue, Norma Rees, President of California State University at Hayward, noted: "K-12 educators, postsecondary educators, employers... we're all in the same business. What we're all doing in one way or another is promoting the quality of life in our community...for the people who live in it and work in it."

## Boosting Skills, Loyalty, and Morale

A benefit that participants frequently cited for students — improved work skills — was commonly noted as helpful to employers as well. "When we have people coming in who have participated in STW programs like internships and mentorships, we know... that, in most cases, they will have more and better developed skills," an employer explained. "That's the carrot for employers to be involved in a program like this. And, for the students, it puts them on a faster career path."

In the experiences of many employers, STW students who come aboard after completing their education tend to be among the most loyal employees. An employer reported, "We're finding that new hires coming from STW are staying, whereas normally, new hires show a 50% drop-off rate."

Frequently cited as an unexpected but important benefit of STW participation was the influence it had on the morale of incumbent employees. An employer at the Miami Dialogue described the effect of his company's student internship program: "I told all my employees, 'What this kid sees you do may affect him for the rest of his life.' I cannot tell you what an effect that had on my employees. Our employees now look at our company in a different light. Not only are we for-profit, but we invest in our community."

Similarly, a hospital administrator involved with student internships said of her workplace: "There's a new excitement about the work you're doing — and it's contagious." Numerous employers reported that the increase in morale has led to a lower attrition rate among their participating employees.

Reflecting their views on the impact of STW in the workplace, employer/labor representatives agreed almost unanimously (97%) that STW is a good strategy for building a competitive workforce for the future. Likewise, participants at the STW State Directors Dialogue found that STW made significant contributions to both workforce and economic development, especially in the following areas (in order):

- Developing strong business/education partnerships
- Increasing understanding by the entire education community of the needs of the workplace
- Increasing awareness of the vital role of comprehensive K-12 career development
- Connecting standards required of all individuals in the workplace with standards in the academic content areas

> "K-12 educators, postsecondary educators, employers... we're all in the same business. What we're all doing in one way or another is promoting the quality of life in our community... for the people who live in it and work in it."
>
> **University President**

> "This program has opened dialogue between educators and businesses that did not exist."
>
> **School Board Member**

## A Story of Success

An educator described how students in her school in rural Iowa responded to their STW experiences: "Students are usually shocked to find out that there are opportunities in small town Iowa, and that they do have the option to come back home to work and earn a decent living," the educator said. "Now many of them... want to give back to their community. We have seven fairly new businesses in town whose owners are recent [STW] graduates.

## Overcoming Barriers

Where benefits to STW involvement for their organizations fell below expectations, employer/labor representatives most frequently cited the following reasons:

- Too limited a time of involvement, leading to a reluctance to evaluate the program's effectiveness
- A perceived lack of cooperation from the school system, or inability to work with the school system
- Frustration at the slow pace of change
- Initial expectations were too high

One employer, reflecting the views of many organizations, claimed, "The STW effort was for a five-year period. This is in no way a long enough period of time to develop the systems needed to support such a comprehensive program."

Other organizations felt that their original expectations evolved over the course of their participation in STW. "For those of us in the first few years," one employer explained, "you could be achieving benefits, but not realizing your expectations yet. It's not that we haven't made progress — we have, especially in terms of forging partnerships — but those aren't necessarily our expected end results."

Indeed, the longer participants were involved, the more likely they were to respond that the benefits to STW involvement for their organization had met or exceeded their expectations. While 56% of participants who had been involved for one year or less said STW met or exceeded their expectations in that area, the percentage jumped to 77% for those who had been involved for 10 or more years.

From the educators' standpoint, some said that they expected more employers to be on board, and that they had difficulty attracting employers. Others found that employer-to-employer recruitment and community public outreach significantly increased employer involvement in STW. Across the board, they agreed that more business people would be interested in participating in STW if they knew about the initiative or its proven benefits to industry.

Participants at the National Employer and Labor Organization Dialogue reached similar conclusions when asked to consider the greatest challenges to developing and maintaining STW partnerships. They cited the following (in order):

- Contrasting cultures (business vs. education)
- Going to scale and achieving sustainability
- Patience in dealing with the bureaucratic complexity of the school system
- Getting buy-in from all stakeholders
- Lack of mutual trust.

Yet, of all these challenges, only lack of mutual trust was cited as a strong enough reason for employers to drop out of partnerships. Indeed, employers by and large felt that their challenges can be overcome, and offered suggestions on strategies for doing so (see page 17).

Notably, among participants who said benefits to their organizations fell below their expectations, *none* reported that they would not remain involved in STW initiatives over the next five years.

## Finding #3: STW Initiatives Have Been Widely Embraced

When the federal STW legislation was passed in 1994, many concepts and ideas were introduced and/or advanced regarding the best ways to prepare students for both college and careers. After many years of experience in implementing STW initiatives, participants were asked their views on the acceptance of these approaches in their communities.

### Staying Involved

The vast majority of participants are interested in maintaining their involvement in STW. Ninety percent (90%) of employer/labor representatives and 80% of cross-cutting participants indicated that they will stay involved in STW initiatives over the next five years.

Educators reported that, provided an opportunity to learn about STW and its benefits, parents, too, would want their children to become involved. "Parents want help with career development for their children," an educator concluded, after 650 parents showed up at her school's first-ever "Career Pathway Night," a STW orientation for parents.

Among participants who reported that they would not stay involved in STW initiatives, over half (53%) cited lack of funding as the primary cause.

### Initiatives in Demand

When asked about STW initiatives that have had the greatest impact on students, many participants replied that it was the STW movement as a whole — rather than any one initiative in isolation. One employer remarked, "It truly should be a seamless system in which a variety of things are happening to impact the students."

At the same time, participants in both sessions were able to isolate specific initiatives that were particularly effective in producing beneficial results for students. Among those repeatedly earning the highest percentage of recognition were (in order):

- Work-based learning opportunities for students, especially internships
- Business/education partnerships
- Professional development for teachers, leading to the integration of workplace skills and competencies into the curriculum

According to participants, STW has made workplace learning experiences available to large numbers of students who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to learn outside the classroom. A STW coordinator reported, "When we started, there were no job shadowing opportunities at all. Now there's hardly a single middle school student who hasn't had at least one such experience — and that's over 18 school districts."

Participants further noted that, while such short-term initiatives as job shadowing and career fairs may reach many more students and provide broad exposure to career fields, more intense opportunities — such as internships tied to a student's coursework — offer more meaningful experiences. "Career fairs are wonderful," one parent noted, "but... we've got to have a way for teachers in the classroom

> "This is in no way a long enough period of time to develop the systems needed to support such a comprehensive program."
>
> **Employer**

## Proof Positive

In his keynote address at the Miami Dialogue, Robert Crook, Director of Business Development for Lucent Technologies — Gulf States Division, and Chair of Florida's STW Leadership Team, presented results from an assessment study of Florida's 28 STW partnerships. Among the study's findings, Crook reported, "We have pockets in the state where the culture has changed — where there has been systemic change in what and how education is being delivered to our children." In addition, [the study] identified over 34,000 active business partners and found that "business is receiving solid return on their investments, with better-quality workers."

to explain what the connection is between careers and what they are teaching." Internships, she and other participants reported, are the most effective way to accomplish this.

Yet, according to many participants, internships have not been available for all students who want them. Numerous teachers and STW coordinators stated that — due to the lack of participating employers and available positions — they had to limit the number of students who participated in more in-depth opportunities, and actually had to turn interested students away.

### Concepts That Resonate

The vast majority of Dialogue participants (97% cross-cutting; 96% employer/labor) believe that it is a good idea for high school students to complete an internship. However, over half of these participants (57% cross-cutting; 55% employer/labor) stated that internships should remain voluntary.

For many participants, internships are proving to be an important link between classes and the workplace. An Indianapolis participant explained, "It used to be that kids entering school were experience-rich and information-poor. Nowadays, they come in information-rich and experience-poor." Internships are seen by many as an ideal means to bridge this gap.

One employer elicited applause from the Indianapolis Dialogue participants when he suggested that, to better align education with modern realities, "internships should be a natural part of learning and teaching. They should not even be noticed as a separate, stand-alone program."

Participants also overwhelmingly favored career majors — programs of study that link academic and occupational instruction with a related workplace learning experience in broad career areas. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of cross-cutting participants and 83% of employer/labor representatives supported the idea of career majors. Many participants (63% employer/labor; 51% cross-cutting) felt that students should be required to select one. When asked about the earliest grade level that students should select a career major, cross-cutting participants were nearly evenly divided: 23% favored selection of career majors prior to ninth grade, 27% at ninth grade, and 27% at 10th grade.

In support of these STW initiatives, 89% of the participants at the State STW Directors Dialogue indicated that, by the end of their federal grant period, their states will have — or are likely to have — developed career majors, clusters, or pathways in at least one broad career area. In addition, the majority said they will have — or are likely to have — implemented state standards that support career awareness (97%) and workplace readiness skills (88%).

Other educational priorities that Dialogue participants rated as somewhat or very important for schools to provide:

- Exposing students to a variety of careers (98% employer/labor; 99% cross-cutting)
- Offering classes that integrate academic and occupational learning (97% employer/labor; 98% cross-cutting)

- Providing opportunities for students to learn in workplaces or other community settings (95% employer/labor; 98% cross-cutting)
- Helping students focus their education on a broad career goal (92% employer/labor; 95% cross-cutting)

Finally, over three-fourths (77%) of employer/labor representatives said that developing portable skill certificates documenting student attainment of industry-recognized technical skills would be important to their organizations.

> "Internships should be a natural part of learning and teaching. They should not even be noticed as a separate, stand-alone program."
>
> **Employer**

## Finding #4: STW Is a Valuable Initiative, Worthy of Continued Commitment and Investment

The federal STW legislation offered states and communities up to five years of venture capital funding to develop and implement STW initiatives. In preparation for the sunset of the federal STW legislation on October 1, 2001, participants were asked to consider ways that communities could sustain and expand STW initiatives, thus ensuring access to STW opportunities for all students who want them in the future.

### Enhancing Employer Involvement

While many participants reported that they have employers knocking down their doors to participate in STW initiatives, others reported they had not yet achieved an optimal level of employer involvement. Yet, all agreed that to make STW opportunities available to more students in the future, communities must find ways to make it easier and more inviting for additional employers to become involved.

Participants offered a variety of situations that prevent more employers from becoming involved with STW initiatives. "Where does a business that wants to get involved turn to?" one employer asked. Another added, "Very often, HR [Human Resources] doesn't know how to go to high schools and get that opportunity."

"A critical issue at the community level," another employer explained, "is how STW and related programs fit into the Workforce Investment Act/Workforce Investment Boards and other federal or state-sponsored programs." Employers cannot understand the "alphabet soup" of programs, he explained, and need a resource where they can get direction.

Finally, some employers reported that they are interested in becoming more involved in STW, but have not been able to secure the needed support from intermediary organizations. As one employer remarked, "Industry is very willing to help by providing the internship sites and providing financial support. But industry cannot do it alone."

To engage more employers in STW, employer/labor representatives suggested the following steps (in order):

- Raise community awareness about the goals and benefits of STW
- Further develop the number and capacity of intermediary organizations
- Build partnerships among business, education, and the community
- Offer financial incentives for employer participation*
- Increase employer-to-employer recruitment

One employer commented on employer-to-employer recruitment stating, "Peers must interest their peers in getting involved, instead of placing the burden on schools." Another employer noted that talking to other employers about the benefits of STW participation has already proven successful and is used extensively in the San Francisco Bay area.

Participants suggested additional strategies for supporting and promoting further employer involvement in STW. "What about a one-stop shop in each community — something of an information clearinghouse, where businesses and schools can share information and opportunities?" an employer offered.

## Sharing Success

Many participants felt that one of the largest obstacles to increased involvement is the misperceptions about STW that exist among parents, educators, and employers.

A STW coordinator explained, "One of my biggest challenges is countering the perception that STW participation limits students to certain tracks, or puts artificial barriers on their options. In reality, the opposite is true. This program opens students' eyes to opportunities they otherwise might never experience or even be aware of."

A Boston Dialogue participant concurred: "It's a myth that this program tracks students into particular careers."

A teacher described another common barrier to greater community involvement: "Some of the more academically oriented students have a hard time convincing their parents to let them participate." Often, he explained, parents believe that STW is only for students who are not going on to college, and not appropriate for their college-bound children.

To counter these misperceptions, participants believe it is important to publicize STW success stories in every community. As a group, they were convinced that students, parents, and other individuals in the community would want to get involved when they learned more about STW and the advantages of participation.

The experience of one educator bore this out. "As a school superintendent, I continually talked to people on the school board about STW," he said. "But I never got through to them. Finally, a board member approached me and said, 'my son went out for job shadowing and it really changed him. He has a new focus.'" The parent, this educator continued, "found out that STW helps kids sort out their lives and their futures."

* Although this approach to increasing employer involvement received majority support, a significant number of participants at many Dialogue sessions expressed opposition to the idea.

## Taking Next Steps

In Dialogue sessions across the country, participants offered ideas to ensure that STW opportunities would remain available for all students in the future. They identified and prioritized steps that might be taken both nationally and in their communities. Among the most frequently cited steps were (in order):

- Continue funding, especially for intermediary activities
- Raise awareness among legislators, parents, and educators about the goals and benefits of STW
- Earn the buy-in of the whole community, to include financial investment from schools and employers
- Make STW part of the education system nationally and integrate it into other education funding streams
- Involve all stakeholders in planning, through a strategic planning committee or other vehicle

One educator spoke for many participants when she explained, "We try to implement programs that cost nothing or very little to maintain. However, without the funding for at least a coordinator, STW will not make it. The teachers are already overworked and cannot take on additional responsibilities. With a coordinator, we can at least maintain most of the programs that we do now."

Summarizing how the vast majority of participants felt about a future public investment in STW, an employer asked, "Why drop the ball now and start financing another program when you have one that is working?"

Further, an employer at the San Francisco Dialogue remarked on the importance of making STW a part of the educational system nationally stating, "We need to focus on systemic change instead of a program here and a program there." Added another employer: "One of the problems is that there are a zillion different funding streams; these should be aligned."

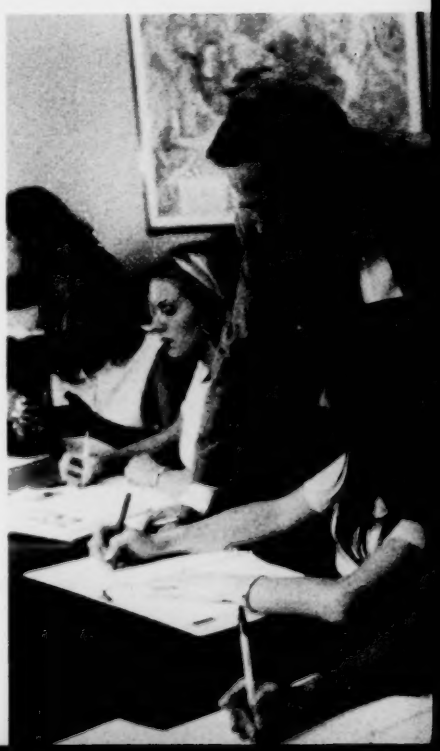
Finally, an employer at the Indianapolis Dialogue suggested that "a model memorandum of understanding of STW's role in relation to [other federal] programs would contribute significantly to the success of STW."

## Investing in the Future

When asked to consider which initiatives they considered worthy of future investment using taxpayer dollars, Dialogue participants frequently echoed the initiatives they identified as being most effective in delivering student benefits. Among the most frequently cited were (in order):

- Work-based learning, especially activities that connect curriculum and careers
- Ongoing professional development for teachers, especially intern/externships for teachers
- Continuing to build partnerships among schools, employers, and community groups to strengthen the infrastructure of STW
- Intermediary organizations or individuals that connect student learning in workplaces and schools

Participants stressed that the core building blocks of STW initiatives — partnerships between employers and educators — were worthy of continued investment. "If we have more time, we can get more support from our business partners,"



## A Story of Success

One parent's experience with internships was typical of many: "Each of my three children had important internships while in college (these opportunities were not available when they were in high school). In each case, the work experience shaped their career interests and actually helped them get their first full-time employment positions."

one educator predicted. "Some of our business partners are just now getting interested, and we have the potential to increase the number 500%."

Participants at the State STW Directors Dialogue cited similar initiatives as worthy of future investment. Among their most highly rated investments were (in order):

- Professional development for all partners
- Including STW principles in teacher education programs
- Business-education partnerships
- State administration and technical assistance

### Teachers in the Workplace

Employers and educators agreed on the need for professional development opportunities for teachers. "Until teachers have the experience and training they need to fully integrate [STW] into their curriculum," one employer said, "the program won't be as effective as it could be."

Teachers who have had an opportunity to participate in externships during school breaks provided some of the most convincing testimony of their effectiveness: "Teachers have returned from these experiences with a profound change in their assumptions about preparing their students for success," said one educator. "A few weeks spent in the field is an invaluable and necessary experience for those who have our country's future in their hands."

A teacher in Philadelphia agreed: "We need this experience to make all of our experiences whole and to fit all of the educational pieces together." Describing the result of her two summer internships at attorneys' offices, she explained, "After my internships, I made significant changes to my curriculum. I developed more hands-on experiences for my students."

Participants felt that professional development opportunities, such as teacher externships, had, in the words of one participant, an "exponential effect" on student learning. "Teacher externships have a big impact because they change the way teachers teach; they offer tremendous bang for the buck. Teacher experiences ultimately affect many students," a Dallas Dialogue participant summed up.

States too have recognized the importance of teacher worksite experiences. The overwhelming majority (83%) of participants at the State STW Directors Dialogue indicated that — by the end of their federal grant period — their states will or are likely to award continuing education credit to teachers who complete workplace internships.

### Connecting Through Intermediaries

Another investment that a majority of stakeholders considered important for the continued success of their STW efforts was the "intermediary" — an organization that acts as a liaison between schools and workplaces and/or other community resources to improve young people's academic and career-related learning experiences. These organizations were considered critical to ensuring that students' workplace activities support their academic achievements in school.

A labor participant reinforced this view: "A key element in every successful implementation of STW has been the intermediary organization. It takes a third party just to broker the supply and demand of resources necessary to make STW happen."

Participants at the National Employer and Labor Organization Dialogue found that a lack of effective intermediaries to connect business and labor with schools was the greatest challenge to working with students. In regional Dialogues, educators reached the same conclusion. "Our businesses want to be involved with schools, but without dedicated facilitators to coordinate activities and act as a resource for employers, STW involvement is nearly impossible," stated one educator.

## Future State Support

Findings from the State STW Directors Dialogue suggest that additional investments and support may be needed to expand and strengthen STW initiatives in local communities when the federal STW legislation sunsets. Only half (56%) of the State STW Directors indicated that their STW office would likely continue to operate in either the same or another location. Most predicted that their office's functions (55%) and staffing (67%) would likely decrease. Where function and staffing reductions were likely, participants primarily attributed the changes to lack of funding. One State STW Director noted that reductions were likely to occur in her state because work had been completed to achieve their end goal — fully integrating STW into their education, workforce development, and economic development systems.

Further, although half (50%) of State STW Directors said that, by the end of their federal grant period, they will have — or are likely to have — state appropriations that support STW, they reported that funding for local partnerships would likely be reduced (36%) or not offered (48%). Several STW Directors commented that, as a result, local communities would be required to weave together other federal, state, and/or local resources to support their STW initiatives in the future.

Finally, when asked about the continuation of state STW services they have provided for their regional and local partnerships over the past several years, State STW Directors predicted that some services were likely to continue at the same level, while many others were likely to be reduced:

- Operating a STW web site (49% same level; 24% reduced level)
- Operating clearinghouses with information and resources for STW implementation (48% same level; 24% reduced level)
- Promoting and coordinating Groundhog Job Shadow Day events and activities (33% same level; 42% reduced level)
- Training for work-based learning mentors (31% same level; 44% reduced level)
- Professional development on STW for stakeholders and practitioners (26% same level; 68% reduced level)
- Conducting research and evaluation studies on the results (20% same level; 68% reduced level)

> "After my internships, I made significant changes to my curriculum. I developed more hands-on experiences for my students."
>
> **Teacher**

> "A key element to successful implementation of STW is the intermediary organization. It takes a third party to broker the supply and demand of resources necessary to make STW happen."
>
> **Labor Representative**

> "We need to focus on systemic change, instead of a program here and a program there."
>
> **Employer**

## When All Is Said and Done

As one educator stated, "Establishing the methods to develop a strong and globally competitive workforce, with well-prepared educators and students, is even more important today than in 1994 when [STW] was enacted." According to participants in both regional and national Dialogues, STW has had an important role to play in this effort, fundamentally changing and revitalizing the nation's education and workforce development efforts.

Moreover, according to participants, STW has had a profound influence on the lives of all individuals involved. For students, one teacher explained, "There is a growing realization that school is not just about getting ready for college, or getting ready for a career. They begin to see that it's all part of a journey of life-long learning."

For other STW stakeholders, one educator summed up the impact: "The community benefits by gaining students who obtain a variety of transferable skills. Parents are thrilled by their change in attitude and interest in academics. Industry benefits in multiple areas: positive public relations and media; heightened interest in [their] industry for careers; motivated employees; increased skills in the labor pool, to name a few. STW provides so many benefits — we've just begun to reap the results."

The open question now is what future role STW will have in education and workforce development efforts in states and local communities across the nation. No question is more important or more immediate to ensure that the end goal of the federal STW legislation is achieved: preparing all young people for college, careers, and productive futures.

## About The Public Forum Institute

The Public Forum Institute is an independent, nonpartisan organization committed to developing the most advanced and effective means of fostering dialogue and debate for the purpose of public policy research and education. It is the belief of the Institute that if decisions in Washington are to be sustained, they must be based on the input of an informed public.

The Public Forum Institute traces its beginnings to 1979 with the founding of the Columbia Institute for Political Research. For more than 20 years, it has conducted hundreds of forums for the purpose of policy research and public dialogue. Within the past year alone, the Public Forum Institute has addressed issues such as education, economic development, health care, information technology, transportation, child welfare, fiscal planning for youth, and retirement security. These forums have engaged hundreds of thousands of Americans in the policy-making process by providing a vehicle for interested citizens, elected officials, issue experts, representatives of government agencies, business leaders and community leaders to discuss the issues.

Through a partnership with government agencies, policymakers, opinion leaders, public television and radio, foundations and corporate philanthropy, the Public Forum Institute continues to contribute to the development of sound public policy.

> "There is a growing realization that school is not just about getting ready for college, or getting ready for a career. They begin to see that it's all part of a journey of lifelong learning."
>
> **Teacher**

"Why drop the ball now and start financing another program when you have one that is working?"

**Employer**



THE PUBLIC FORUM INSTITUTE 2300 M STREET NW • SUITE [illegible] • WASHINGTON, DC 20037 • [illegible]